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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR VISIT TO PARIS -- NOVEMBER 8,
2009

PARIS 00001473 001.3 OF 004

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Charles H. Rivkin, for reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY. Madam Secretary, your Paris Embassy and the French are eager to welcome you to France. FM Kouchner quickly invited you to lunch or a meeting on Sunday, which is not a usual practice. He looks forward to talking with you about key issues, including Afghanistan, Iran, and relations with Russia. Kouchner recently visited Afghanistan, and he will undoubtedly be interested in hearing your insights about recent developments there and your views on Pakistan. France is our strongest ally in pursuing a dual track policy with Iran, and has been helpful in rallying Europe to a more clear-eyed assessment of Iran's nuclear ambitions. Paris welcomed the U.S. "reset" with Russia and views Moscow as a strategic partner that cannot be ignored. End Summary.

SARKOZY AND KOUCHNER

¶2. (S/NF) FM Kouchner, coming from the opposition Socialist Party, is regularly polled as one of the most popular French politicians and is a high-profile example of Sarkozy's successful policy of outreach to the leaders of other political parties. He has a solid working relationship with the demanding French President. Kouchner has also carved out specific areas where he has largely free rein and which play to his strengths and previous experience, including in humanitarian affairs, the Balkans, and democratization efforts. Despite these positives, we have occasionally witnessed lapses in communication between the two offices due to Sarkozy's tendency to seize the initiative and "speak first, consult later" and his penchant for proposing high-level summits to cut through bureaucratic red tape.

¶3. (S/NF) Both Sarkozy and Kouchner are committed to a strong Europe with a strong transatlantic relationship with the U.S. Both see Europe as our closest, most natural partner in fighting terrorism in Afghanistan and piracy on the high seas, or promoting peace as part of the Middle East Peace process quartet, fighting Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, and in stabilizing the Balkans. Likewise, they view France, and neighboring Germany, as the natural leaders of Europe. Kouchner and Sarkozy both have a pragmatic approach to problems, characterized by a high degree of "hands on" personal involvement in the issues that interest them. Your visit will give FM Kouchner an opportunity to showcase his close ties to you and to the Obama administration, vindicating France's unabashed "pro-American"

stance, which is a significant reversal from the Chirac years when France defined its power more in opposition to, rather than collaboration with, the United States.

AFGHANISTAN: SAME GOALS, LIMITED RESOURCES

14. (C/NF) FM Kouchner was in Afghanistan on October 17-18 on a "purely political" trip designed to consult with the main presidential candidates and to move the electoral process forward. He cooperated closely with Senator Kerry to send a combined message of support for the acceptance of a second round of voting. Afghanistan remains a high foreign policy priority for the French government, but they have difficulty translating their interest into additional concrete military and civilian support. French government officials, including both President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner, have long advocated that "there is no purely military solution" to Afghanistan. When it comes to putting resources behind the statement, however, the French government has limited options, due to political maneuvering and real economic constraints. As a sop to his own party in exchange for support for French reintegration into NATO this April, Sarkozy has publicly and repeatedly promised "not to send one extra soldier" to fight an unpopular war in Afghanistan. This is now a political line French leaders will not cross, although their military has privately expressed both the will and the capacity for further contributions. To compensate, the GOF is currently shifting some of its troops from a security posture in Kabul

PARIS 00001473 002.2 OF 004

to more active combat roles in the east, where the bulk of their 3,000 troops are now located. In March, President Sarkozy created France's first politically-appointed Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, a post now held by Sarkozy crony UMP deputy Thierry Mariani. Kouchner fought this appointment in favor of a career diplomat because political appointments in the French parliamentary system are limited to six months in length, limiting the effectiveness of the position as it currently functions.

15. (C/NF) There is great interest, particularly within the MFA and from Kouchner personally, to increase French civilian development assistance to Afghanistan, with a focus on raising the salaries of Afghan police and other security forces. However, these goals are tempered by very limited resources. After a battle with the Finance Ministry, the MFA succeeded in restoring French civilian assistance to Afghanistan to previous modest levels of 40 million euros (58.4 million U.S. dollars) after budget cuts threatened to limit French assistance to only 10 million Euros this year (about 14.6 million U.S. dollars). One additional area for growth is the deployment by December 1 of the bulk of the 150 French gendarmes who make up part of the European Gendarmerie Force for police training. They will be joined soon by Italian carabinieri and possibly small contributions from other countries in the coming year. President Sarkozy is expected to finally take a long-delayed trip to the region next spring.

16. (C/NF) In September, the French President joined his German and UK counterparts to propose a conference on Afghanistan by the end of the year. Kouchner wanted to bring other Foreign Ministers to Paris to meet you to pursue this European goal. French officials have since

stated that if the security situation allows, they would like the conference to take place in Kabul as soon as possible, with a possible second session taking place later, after the Afghan government is better able to prioritize its work plan and strategy.

PAKISTAN: COIN AND CIVILIAN LOANS

17. (C/NF) On Pakistan, the French are relative newcomers who have requested close cooperation with the UK and United States, particularly in areas of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency assistance. France is providing military assistance and security cooperation to Pakistan, in addition to civilian emergency and humanitarian aid. Paris officials complain that Pakistani cooperation in combating the Afghan Taliban refuted in their country is weak, if not non-existent. France has given about five million euros (7.3 million U.S. dollars) in emergency and reconstruction assistance to Pakistan this year. France has also increased its concessionary loan commitments to Pakistan since the April Tokyo conference from 200 to 382 million euros (573 million U.S. dollars). The loans cover nine projects in the areas of hydroelectricity and energy efficiency. France is still also dispensing funds made under soft loans worth 11 million euros (16 million U.S. dollars) for post-earthquake reconstruction; it is not yet ready to contribute to the World Bank-administered multi-donor trust fund for Pakistan as it was not clear who their partners on the Pakistani side would be and what safeguards there would be over the funds.

IRAN: FEARS THAT WE ARE LOSING GROUND

18. (S/NF) In their October 14 phone call, Presidents Sarkozy and Obama agreed that if Iran responds negatively to the uranium enrichment deal on the table, then we must take more serious measures, including additional sanctions. Senior French officials believe that we are losing traction on this issue within the international community, as countries continue to engage in normal diplomatic and commercial relations with Iran (exemplified by Chinese business interests, Turkish PM Erdogan's recent visit to Iran, and Iranian President Ahmedinejad's planned trip to Brazil in late November). Sarkozy's position is bolstered by his staunch

PARIS 00001473 003.2 OF 004

belief in non-proliferation (to maintain France's own deterrent capability), his real concern about the threat to Israel, and his personal ire at the way Iran has tried to manipulate France, including by holding French citizen Clotilde Reiss and Franco-Iranian dual national Nazak Afshar for alleged illegal participation in this summer's street protests. Some senior French officials have suggested that Sarkozy's tough line can be useful as "the pointy edge of the sword" in meeting the Iranian challenge. As we plan next steps on Iran, Kouchner will likely be interested in your readout of your recent discussions in Moscow as well as the latest efforts to bring China on board.

PUSHING ENGAGEMENT WITH RUSSIA

19. (C/NF) French policy toward Russia under President Sarkozy reflects the belief that engagement with Moscow is the best way to influence Russian behavior. Paris has welcomed U.S. efforts to "re-set" relations with Russia and has consistently emphasized developing a common approach with Washington toward Moscow. French officials maintain

that dialogue must underpin our efforts to elicit Moscow's cooperation; this is particularly true on European security, an area in which Sarkozy -- who last year proposed an OSCE summit on the issue -- seeks to exert French leadership. French priorities for strategic dialogue with Moscow include promoting economic cooperation; encouraging Russia to work through institutions with set rules; supporting Russian actions in public while taking a more honest approach in private meetings; and cultivating relations with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, in the hope that he can become a leader independent of Vladimir Putin. Putin is due in Paris later this month, Sarkozy will go to Moscow in February, and Medvedev will visit France in March 2010.

AN URGENT FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

¶10. (SBU) The French remain divided on how to respond to the Obama Administration's approaches to climate change. Most of the interested public and many in the government believe that interim 2020 reduction targets, and the level of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and concentrations at that time, will determine success or failure in slowing global warming. For them, the EU's target of 20 to 30 percent reductions below 1990 is the sole measure of an acceptable policy. Even sophisticated observers are skeptical that long-term reduction goals legislated in the United States can be counted on as more than aspirations, especially if radical cuts are not imposed up front. We have reiterated that U.S. laws are reliably enforced by the Federal government and by U.S. courts, using the Clean Air Act as our example. Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials agree that legislation moving through Congress and the Administration's proposals would establish a system comparable to the EU's measures. These officials regard Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo's public criticisms of Waxman-Markey as "insufficient on the medium term goal" as distracting attention from the need for China and India to reduce their rates of growth in GHG emissions.

WANTS TO BE A PLAYER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

¶11. (S/NF) The GOF is eager to engage with the United States on the Middle East peace process and worries we are not moving fast enough. President Sarkozy and FM Kouchner continue to press for a Middle East peace summit before the end of the year, to be held under the auspices of the Union for the Mediterranean, of which Egypt and France are currently co-chairs. A sense of frustration and ambition informs the French approach toward the Middle East peace process: they are frustrated that they must rely on the USG and on stubborn parties in the region to end a conflict whose persistence adversely affects their national interests, and they are ambitious to play a larger role in the peace process, in order to facilitate a successful outcome and to enjoy the prestige that such a role would earn them. As a case in point, last week Kouchner had to cancel a planned visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories in part because of the continuing tension there, and in part because of Israel's refusal to allow him

PARIS 00001473 004.2 OF 004

to visit a French hospital in Gaza. Nonetheless, aside from their criticism of the pace at which we have proceeded with negotiations, French officials continue to take concrete steps to support our efforts to broker peace among the various states and groups in the region: they have consistently affirmed our leadership role in their own bilateral contacts, in multilateral fora, and in public and private statements.

INCREASING CONCERNS ABOUT U.S. FOCUS ON DISARMAMENT

¶12. (S/NF) French officials are increasingly concerned that the Obama administration's commitment to an eventual "world free of nuclear weapons" represents a divergence from the French position on a strong deterrence policy. Furthermore, they worry that a focus on disarmament goals by legitimate nuclear weapons states will pressure them to cut their own modest arsenal and will serve as a distraction from serious proliferation concerns by states like North Korea and Iran. The GOF would like to use every available forum, including the 2010 NPT Review Conference, to strongly and specifically rebuke Iran and North Korea (and were greatly disappointed by our decision not to do so at the September 24 UNSC summit). Additionally, France is "psychologically" committed to a deterrent force as a symbol of its strategic independence and they will strive to maintain the "legitimacy" of nuclear weapons as a key element of military strategy. Any suggestion that bilateral U.S.-Russian arms reduction talks should eventually include other nuclear powers, or that an FMCT should address existing stockpiles, are absolute redlines for the French.

A PARTNER IN AFRICA

¶13. (C) France is struggling somewhat to implement Sarkozy's vision of a new approach to Africa, in part because of recent governance crises in a number of Francophone countries, including Mauritania, Gabon, Madagascar, Niger, and Guinea, where the need for expediency in bringing stability can sometimes trump loftier principles. We are still waiting to see if France will, in fact close down one of its military bases on the Atlantic side, in Senegal or Gabon in an effort to streamline its presence in Africa. That said, France is a progressively more open interlocutor on Africa and there are many areas where we are working closely, including pushing for a transitional government in Guinea, supporting efforts to deter sexual violence, and, increasingly, coordinating on addressing the AQIM threat in Mali and Mauritania. The MFA's initial response to our new Sudan strategy is positive. France, as the leader of the EU's anti piracy effort off the Horn of Africa is an important partner on counter-piracy and maritime security issues.

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